Protecting Intellectual Freedom in Your Public Library

Scenarios from the Front Lines

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For the Office for Intellectual Freedom

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The basis of intellectual freedom in libraries lies in the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution: “Congress shall make no law . . . abridging the freedom of speech . . .” Over the years, courts have held that the right to speak is meaningless without the right to be heard, and so established a corollary right to receive speech. Since the public library is established by government specifically for the receipt of speech, the “quintessential locus of the receipt of information” according to the Third Circuit Court of Appeals, access to a public library is also a corollary First Amendment right.¹

The First Amendment also contains a provision that guarantees the right “to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.” It’s this right that creates a dilemma for public libraries: we must protect both the right to read the book and the right to request that the book be removed.

While there are other rights that directly impact public libraries—the right to privacy in the Fourth Amendment, the right to due process in the Fifth Amendment, and the right to equal protection in the Fourteenth Amendment—it’s the First Amendment that defines what we do and why—the essence of the library’s role in a democracy.

Ours is a never-ending struggle, one we can’t avoid by writing perfect policies or by refusing to add “controversial” items. It’s a task that calls on us to look beyond our own preferences and prejudices, one that sometimes provokes personal attacks and confrontation; but the work of protecting the ideas entrusted to our care is the most profound responsibility of our profession.

CHAPTER 1

Collection Development

Intellectual freedom cannot bring itself into existence. Librarians must apply the principles of intellectual freedom to activities undertaken daily—materials selection, reference service, reevaluation, protection of confidential patron information, and most important, collection building. It is in acquisition and its product, the collection, that intellectual freedom must be reflected.


The foundation of building library collections and protecting them is having a collection development policy in place, one adopted by the governing body, so everyone knows how the library will select items and how it will handle challenges.

Because constitutional rights are implicated in both adding and removing material, all policies and procedures affecting the collection need to be content and viewpoint neutral, and they need to be applied equally. Also, the library must follow its adopted policies and procedures in all aspects of collection development—it’s not enough just to have them in a policy manual someplace that no one can find and no one has read.

Not all of the cases that follow are the major community-wide incidents that generate hundreds of irate letters to the editor of the local newspaper or that result in heated testimony at a twelve-hour public
hearing, but they do involve potential problems with various aspects of the collection.

CASE STUDY 1

A local resident, Jane, came across The Joy of Gay Sex while browsing for a “safe” book about puberty for her twelve-year-old daughter. Jane demanded that the reference librarian, Susan, remove it immediately. Susan tried to explain that the library serves everyone in the community, but Jane remained adamant. Susan then gave Jane a copy of the collection development policy with the library’s selection criteria and described how the library decided which books to buy. Jane was a bit calmer by then, but she still took the reconsideration form that Susan offered when the latter explained the procedure for registering a formal complaint.

At this point, Jane has not filed a formal complaint, and that is how the story ends in the vast majority of incidents. The reason for the minimal instance of formal complaints is a staff that responds with respect, sympathy, and the ability to explain the basic selection process. For a detailed discussion of what should happen if the user does submit a formal reconsideration, please see chapter 5, “Challenges.”

This case highlights the importance of having a comprehensive collection development policy in place. The collection development policy’s most important job is to tell everyone—the public, the governing board, and the staff—how the library is developing the collection and why. Its importance for the public is to explain the values and procedures by which the staff will build the library collection and respond to complaints; for the governing board, it serves to gather the principles and policies they expect the library to follow when selecting and reconsidering material; and for the staff, it provides a blueprint for collection development as selectors change over time and a standard for all staff as they interact with the public.

The collection development policy must be in place before a major incident occurs. If it’s not on the books in advance, the person filing the complaint will never believe it wasn’t written just to frustrate her.
COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT POLICIES

The policy can be a short statement of goals, principles, and needs with collection management details in a separate document, or it can be comprehensive, with all collection-related material in one longer document. While each approach has its benefits, the longer version has the important bonus of preventing the details from getting lost.

Whichever approach works best for your library, it must cover the selection criteria and the intellectual freedom policies and procedures the library follows. It should also include:

- a statement of the policy’s purpose and intended audience
- the frequency of review by the governing body
- a general description of the collection and its goals
- a review of the users and how they can provide input
- an explanation of how your library manages its resources, either within a comprehensive document or as an attached document

In some cases, it is only the selection criteria and intellectual freedom statement that the governing board formally adopts, with the rest of the collection development policy residing in the library administration's control. Regardless, the collection development policy stands as the library's official document controlling the collection.

SELECTION

Selection is the heart of the collection development process, and the criteria your library adopts for guiding that process are critical, both for the library's success in serving the full spectrum of its users and for defending the collection when someone files a request for reconsideration.

There are occasional complaints stating that librarians are censors because they don't buy everything and allow their personal beliefs to determine what they do include in the collection. The classic analysis of this statement is Lester Asheim's article “Not Censorship but Selection,” first published in 1953 and robustly pertinent today. These excerpts provide a brief synopsis:

The major characteristic which makes for the all-important difference seems to be this: that the selector’s approach is positive, while that of the censor is negative. This is more than a verbal quibble, it transforms the entire act and the steps included in it.
The selector says, if there is anything good in this book let us try to keep it; the censor says, if there is anything bad in this book, let us reject it. And since there is seldom a flawless work in any form, the censor’s approach can destroy much that is worth saving.

Finally, the selector begins, ideally, with a presumption in favor of liberty of thought; the censor does not. The aim of the selector is to promote reading, not to inhibit it; to multiply the points of view which will find expression, not limit them; to be a channel for communication, not a bar against it. In a sense, perhaps, it could be said that the librarian is interfering with the freedom to read whenever he fails to make some book available. But viewed realistically, the librarian is promoting the freedom to read by making as accessible as possible as many things as he can, and his selection is more likely to be in the direction of stimulating controversy.

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**Collection Development Policy Elements**

**Introduction**
- States purpose of the policy
- Describes what the policy covers
- Stipulates frequency of review by governing board

**Collection Purpose or Mission**
- Defines general goals of the library’s collection
- Highlights priority areas of development, if applicable

**User Needs**
- Recognizes obligation to user-driven collection development
- Requires regular evaluation of user needs
- Emphasizes importance of user requests for additions

**Intellectual Freedom**
- Defines policies adopted by the governing body, e.g., Library Bill of Rights
- Requires neutrality of viewpoint and content in selection decisions
- Defines responsibility to provide all perspectives
- Defines parental responsibility for their own children’s use of library resources
- Describes the reconsideration procedure

**Selection**
- Allows for individual professional judgment
- Describes review sources consulted
and introducing innovation than in suppressing the new and perpetuating the stereotype. That is why he so often selects works which shock some people. The books which have something new to say are most likely to shock and consequently may not readily find another outlet through which to say it. The frequent forays of the censors against the libraries is heartening evidence that selection and censorship are different things.

Selection seeks to protect the right of the reader to read; censorship seeks to protect—not the right—but the reader himself from the fancied effects of his reading. The selector has faith in the intelligence of the reader; the censor has faith only in his own.

Selection is democratic while censorship is authoritarian, and in our democracy we have traditionally tended to put our trust in the selector rather than in the censor.¹
The selection criteria should be broadly written to cover all material, regardless of source, and should be flexible enough to cover constantly changing technologies. The statement should also recognize the importance of professional judgment and the resources the staff may consult in the selection process.

*It's important to remember that the library is defending the policy, not the specific book in a reconsideration request—if the book meets the library's adopted selection criteria, it deserves its place in the library.*

The following sections demonstrate a general statement, followed by lists of general criteria and specific criteria for nonfiction and fiction material:

Selection of library materials, whether purchased or donated, is based upon the informational, educational, recreational, and professional needs of the community but is limited by factors such as budget, space, agreements with other libraries, and content of existing collections.

Every item must be considered in terms of its own excellence and the audience for whom it is intended. There is no single standard which can be applied in all acquisition decisions. Some materials may be judged primarily in terms of artistic merit, scholarship, or value as human documents; others are selected to satisfy the recreational or informational needs of the community. Materials are judged on total effect rather than specific illustrations, words, passages, or scenes which in themselves may be considered by some to be offensive.

A policy, however thorough, cannot replace the judgment of individual librarians, but only provides guidelines to assist them in choosing from the vast array of available materials. In selection, the librarian uses professional judgment and expertise, based on understanding of user needs and a knowledge of authors and publishers or producers. Reviews from professional, specialized, and general periodicals, in addition to standard lists of basic works, are also consulted. At times, the library staff may consult with others more knowledgeable in a specific subject for advice on developing that area.

Expanding areas of knowledge, changing social values, technological advances, and cultural differences require flexibility, open-mindedness, and responsiveness in the evaluation and reevaluation of all library materials. Material will not be excluded because of the origin, background, or views of the writer. In order to build collections of merit,
whether purchased or donated, materials will be considered according to both general and specific criteria as listed below:

A. General Criteria for the Evaluation of Library Materials
- Reputation and/or significance of author, producer, performer, etc.;
- Suitability of subject and style for intended audience;
- Relation to existing collection and other material on the subject;
- Suitability of physical format for library use;
- Present and potential relevance to community needs;
- Appropriateness and effectiveness of medium to content;
- Insight into human and social conditions;
- Importance as a document of the times;
- Skill, competence, and purpose of author, producer, performer, etc.;
- Attention of critics, reviewers, and public; and/or
- Prizes, awards, or honors received.

B. Specific Criteria for the Evaluation of Works of Information and Opinion
- Authority of author;
- Comprehensiveness and depth of treatment;
- Objectivity and integrity;
- Clarity, accuracy, and logic of presentation;
- Representation of challenging works, including extreme and/or minority points of view; and/or
- Contribution to subject balance of the entire collection.

C. Specific Criteria for the Evaluation of Works of Imagination
- Representation of important movement, genre, trend, or national culture;
- Vitality and originality;
- Artistic expression, presentation, and experimentation;
- Sustained interest; and/or
- Effective characterization.

A reminder of professional responsibility in the task of selecting material for the library is in the interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights, “Diversity in Collection Development”:

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Intellectual freedom, the essence of equitable library services, provides for free access to all expressions of ideas through which any and all sides of a question, cause, or movement may be explored. Tolerance is meaningless without tolerance for what some may consider detestable. Librarians cannot justly permit their own preferences to limit their degree of tolerance in collection development, because freedom is indivisible.

With a carefully crafted policy, expressive and flexible selection criteria, and a full recognition of the ethical responsibilities involved, the library should be in a strong position to develop and defend its collections.

**INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM**

This section of the collection development policy gathers all documents that have been adopted by the governing body and the procedures that the library uses when it receives a request to label, move, restrict, or remove an item. It is important to note that the ALA policies that are typically mentioned here, such as the Library Bill of Rights and its interpretations, change from private documents to official documents, as the governing body says: “We agree with these policies and adopt them as our legally guiding principles and procedures.” The policy should cite these documents and include them in an appendix.

Important parts of this section tell the community that your library provides material to serve the entire spectrum of interests without personal prejudice; that the policy applies to minors; and that parents are responsible for their own children’s use of library resources.

The intellectual freedom section should also include the reconsideration procedure, so the public, staff, and governing body fully understand the steps that each must follow when the library receives a formal complaint. An additional benefit of including the procedure here is that this gives the library an argument for including the procedure in the code of local ordinances, which gives politicians a graceful way to avoid becoming embroiled in a major brouhaha, and prevents politicians who think removing the book is a good campaign issue from becoming embroiled, at least officially.

Whether or not the procedure enters the local code, the intellectual freedom section should include a statement that indicates the governing body is the last administrative remedy, and that anyone who wants to continue with the challenge must go to court.
Diversity in Collection Development

An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights

Collection development should reflect the philosophy inherent in Article II of the Library Bill of Rights: “Libraries should provide materials and information presenting all points of view on current and historical issues. Materials should not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval.” Library collections must represent the diversity of people and ideas in our society. There are many complex facets to any issue, and many contexts in which issues may be expressed, discussed, or interpreted. Librarians have an obligation to select and support access to materials and resources on all subjects that meet, as closely as possible, the needs, interests, and abilities of all persons in the community the library serves.

Librarians have a professional responsibility to be inclusive, not exclusive, in collection development and in the provision of interlibrary loan. Access to all materials and resources legally obtainable should be assured to the user, and policies should not unjustly exclude materials and resources even if they are offensive to the librarian or the user. This includes materials and resources that reflect a diversity of political, economic, religious, social, minority, and sexual issues. A balanced collection reflects a diversity of materials and resources, not an equality of numbers.

Collection development responsibilities include selecting materials and resources in different formats produced by independent, small and local producers as well as information resources from major producers and distributors. Materials and resources should represent the languages commonly used in the library's service community and should include formats that meet the needs of users with disabilities. Collection development and the selection of materials and resources should be done according to professional standards and established selection and review procedures. Librarians may seek to increase user awareness of materials and resources on various social concerns by many means, including, but not limited to, issuing lists of resources, arranging exhibits, and presenting programs.

Over time, individuals, groups, and entities have sought to limit the diversity of library collections. They cite a variety of reasons that include prejudicial language and ideas, political content, economic theory, social philosophies, religious beliefs, sexual content and expression, and other potentially controversial topics. Examples of such censorship may include removing or not selecting materials because they are considered by some as racist or sexist; not purchasing conservative religious materials; not selecting resources about or by minorities because it is thought these groups or interests are not represented in a community; or not providing information or materials from or about non-mainstream political entities. Librarians have a professional responsibility to be fair, just, and equitable and to give all library users equal protection in guarding against violation of the library patron's right to read, view, or listen to materials and resources protected by the First Amendment, no matter what the viewpoint of the author, creator, or selector. Librarians have an obligation to protect library collections from removal of materials and resources based on personal bias or prejudice.

Intellectual freedom, the essence of equitable library services, provides for free access to all expressions of ideas through which any and all sides of a question, cause, or movement may be explored. Toleration is meaningless without tolerance for what some may consider detestable. Librarians must not permit their own preferences to limit their degree of tolerance in collection development.


http://ifmanual.org/diversecollection
It is critical that your library follow its policies and procedures. Failure to do so may result in a court’s finding the library guilty of removing material based on personal prejudice or belief, a case of “improper motivation,” as noted in Board of Education, Island Trees Union Free School District No. 26 v. Pico, 457 U.S. 853 (1982).

The following example illustrates a policy that includes both the intellectual freedom policy and the reconsideration procedure:

The Fairbanks North Star Borough Public Library subscribes to and supports the American Library Association’s Library Bill of Rights and its interpretations (Appendix B), the Freedom to Read Statement (Appendix D), and Libraries: An American Value (Appendix F).

The library takes no sides on public issues and does not attempt to promote any beliefs or points of view through its collection. The library also does not endorse the opinions expressed in the materials held. The library recognizes its responsibility to provide materials presenting various and diverse points of view.

The standards stated in this policy will apply equally to the materials for children. The library believes that individuals may reject for themselves or their children materials which they find unsuitable. Parents are responsible for the use of library resources by their own children. Parents who wish to limit or restrict the use of the library by their children should personally oversee their selections.

Patrons concerned about material in the collection are welcome to discuss those concerns with a professional staff member. When patrons want the Selection Committee to reconsider items in the collection, they will be given the Request for Reconsideration form (see Appendix G), and informed of the reconsideration procedure. When the patron returns the completed form, the Collection Services Manager in the case of adult materials, the Youth Services Librarian in the case of youth materials, or the Circulation/Media Librarian in the case of audiovisual materials will read or examine the item in its entirety, gather any available reviews of the item, and report to the Selection Committee at its next scheduled meeting. The Committee will reevaluate the item in terms of the selection criteria, collection assessment data, collecting responsibilities, and the library’s mission and roles statements. Committee members will vote by secret ballot, and the Library Director will communicate the Committee’s decision to the individual who submitted the Request for Reconsideration.

If the patron wishes to appeal the decision of the Selection Committee, the Library Director will bring the complaint and supporting documentation to the Library Commission at the next regularly scheduled Commission meeting. In accordance with Borough Ordinance 2.32.041, five members of the Commission shall be required for a quorum and five affirmative votes shall be necessary to carry the question. The decision of the Commission shall be final. Further appeal must be referred to a court of competent jurisdiction within 30 days from the date the Commission mails its decision to the patron.
In 1976, members of the Island Trees School Board directed school officials to remove ten books from the school district's high school and junior high school libraries. The board members characterized the books as “anti-American, anti-Christian, anti-Semitic, and just plain filthy,” and asserted that the books' removal was necessary to protect the district's students. Among the books ordered removed were Kurt Vonnegut Jr.’s *Slaughterhouse Five*, Langston Hughes's *Best Short Stories of Negro Writers*, *Go Ask Alice*, Alice Childress's *A Hero Ain’t Nothin’ but a Sandwich*, and Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice*.

A group of students led by Steven Pico filed a lawsuit to challenge the school board's actions, asserting that the school board's decision to remove the books violated students’ First Amendment rights. The school board argued that both law and tradition had vested it with broad authority to control the materials available in the school library. The lawsuit eventually reached the United States Supreme Court.

In 1982, the Supreme Court decided *Board of Education, Island Trees Union Free School District No. 26 v. Pico*. The decision stands today as the principal legal authority addressing the censorship of library materials.

In its opinion, the court explicitly recognized a First Amendment right to receive information in the library, stating that “the right to receive ideas is a necessary predicate to the recipient's meaningful exercise of his own right of speech, press and political freedom,” and identifying the library as the principal locus of the freedom “to inquire, to study and to evaluate. . . .”

The court then described the limits placed upon the board's authority to remove books from the library:

- Our Constitution does not permit the official suppression of ideas. Thus whether petitioners' removal of books from their school libraries denied respondents their First Amendment rights depends upon the motivation behind petitioners' actions.

  If petitioners intended by their removal decision to deny respondents access to ideas with which petitioners disagreed, and if this intent was the decisive factor in petitioners' decision, then petitioners have exercised their discretion in violation of the Constitution. (emphasis added)

Having established the standard for evaluating the student plaintiffs’ claims, the court examined the evidence and found that there was a genuine issue as to whether the school board had violated the First Amendment rights of the plaintiffs. The court pointed to board members’ statements that the removed books were “anti-American” and “offensive to . . . Americans in general” as proof of the board’s improper motivation in removing the books from the library’s collection.

The court said further proof of the board’s bad intent could be found in the board’s failure to use an established and unbiased procedure to review the challenged books. According to the record established in the case, the school board ignored its own established policy for reviewing controversial materials and disregarded the advice and information provided by the superintendent of schools, the librarians and
teachers within the Island Trees School district, literary experts, and professional publications.

The court’s opinion in *Pico* remains vital today. Courts uniformly apply the reasoning used in *Pico* to resolve censorship controversies in libraries; most recently, a federal district court in Wichita Falls, Texas, relied on *Pico* to determine whether the city council was motivated by a desire to suppress or eliminate disfavored ideas and viewpoints when it removed two books from the children’s area of the local public library. In resolving the case in favor of the young library users whose First Amendment rights were violated by the removal of the two books, the court noted that the principles set forth in *Pico*—a school library case—have even greater force when applied to public libraries.

Books and other materials acquired by the public library through its established collection development policy are protected speech, and the library user’s right to read and consult those materials is protected by the First Amendment. If a library’s governing body undertakes to remove a book or other library materials from the library, it must do so using established and unbiased policies and procedures, and ensure that those policies and procedures are followed whenever an individual or group challenges library materials.

**Additional Resources**


*Sund v. City of Wichita Falls*, 121 F. Supp. 2d 530 (N.D. Tex. 2000)
There is a sample reconsideration form and a letter responding to the person filing the complaint in chapter 5, “Challenges.”

In the case of complaints, your library should be guided by the policies its governing board has adopted, in this case, the Library Bill of Rights interpretation “Access to Library Resources and Services Regardless of Sex, Gender Identity, Gender Expression, or Sexual Orientation”:

Library services, materials, and programs representing diverse points of view on sex, gender identity, gender expression, or sexual orientation should be considered for purchase and inclusion in library collections and programs. The Association affirms that attempts to proscribe or remove materials dealing with gay, lesbian, bisexual, and/or transgendered life without regard to the written, approved selection policy violate this tenet and constitute censorship.

COLLECTION MANAGEMENT

The rest of the cases in this section focus on collection management issues that can affect intellectual freedom. The library may never have to reply to a challenge based on these points, but they may be useful additions to the collection development policy, especially if they’re on the books before a problem arises. Some of them may also help demonstrate the library’s stewardship of the public’s resources, which is a question that sometimes arises along with a major censorship incident.

CASE STUDY 2

The Rivertown Public Library has a collection of Christian books that it keeps in closed shelving in the staff area. They are mostly fiction in paperback format from religious publishers, such as Nelson and Bethany House, purchased from a local Christian bookstore. The library’s selection committee had decided several years ago not to process them because they were viewed as inferior in “literary quality” compared to the general fiction collection and didn’t really meet the library’s selection criteria. Since they weren’t fully processed, they weren’t in the catalog, and users had to know about them by word of mouth and then ask for them at one of the public service desks. Rebecca finally got tired of never knowing which books were available and complained that she shouldn’t be treated like a second-class citizen and neither should the books she likes.
Access to Library Resources and Services
Regardless of Sex, Gender Identity, Gender Expression, or Sexual Orientation

An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights

American libraries exist and function within the context of a body of laws derived from the United States Constitution and the First Amendment. The Library Bill of Rights embodies the basic policies that guide libraries in the provision of services, materials, and programs.

In the preamble to its Library Bill of Rights, the American Library Association affirms that all libraries are forums for information and ideas. This concept of forum and its accompanying principle of inclusiveness pervade all six Articles of the Library Bill of Rights.

The American Library Association stringently and unequivocally maintains that libraries and librarians have an obligation to resist efforts that systematically exclude materials dealing with any subject matter, including sex, gender identity, gender expression, or sexual orientation:

- Article I of the Library Bill of Rights states that “Materials should not be excluded because of the origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation.” The Association affirms that books and other materials coming from gay, lesbian, bisexual, and/or transgendered presses, gay, lesbian, bisexual, and/or transgendered authors or other creators, and materials regardless of format or services dealing with gay, lesbian, bisexual, and/or transgendered life are protected by the Library Bill of Rights. Librarians are obligated by the Library Bill of Rights to endeavor to select materials without regard to the sex, gender identity, or sexual orientation of their creators by using the criteria identified in their written, approved selection policies (ALA policy 53.1.5).

- Article II maintains that “Libraries should provide materials and information presenting all points of view on current and historical issues. Materials should not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval.” Library services, materials, and programs representing diverse points of view on sex, gender identity, gender expression, or sexual orientation should be considered for purchase and inclusion in library collections and programs (ALA policies 53.1.1, 53.1.9, and 53.1.11). The Association affirms that attempts to proscribe or remove materials dealing with gay, lesbian, bisexual, and/or transgendered life without regard to the written, approved selection policy violate this tenet and constitute censorship.

- Articles III and IV mandate that libraries “challenge censorship” and cooperate with those “resisting abridgement of free expression and free access to ideas.”

- Article V holds that “A person’s right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background, or views.” In the Library Bill of Rights and all its Interpretations, it is intended that: “origin” encompasses all
the characteristics of individuals that are inherent in the circumstances of their birth; “age” encompasses all the characteristics of individuals that are inherent in their levels of development and maturity; “background” encompasses all the characteristics of individuals that are a result of their life experiences; and “views” encompasses all the opinions and beliefs held and expressed by individuals. Therefore, Article V of the Library Bill of Rights mandates that library services, materials, and programs be available to all members of the community the library serves, without regard to sex, gender identity, gender expression, or sexual orientation. This includes providing youth with comprehensive sex education literature (ALA policy 52.5.2).

Article VI maintains that “Libraries which make exhibit spaces and meeting rooms available to the public they serve should make such facilities available on an equitable basis, regardless of the beliefs or affiliations of individuals or groups requesting their use.” This protection extends to all groups and members of the community the library serves, without regard to sex, gender identity, gender expression, or sexual orientation.

The American Library Association holds that any attempt, be it legal or extra-legal, to regulate or suppress library services, materials, or programs must be resisted in order that protected expression is not abridged. Librarians have a professional obligation to ensure that all library users have free and equal access to the entire range of library services, materials, and programs. Therefore, the Association strongly opposes any effort to limit access to information and ideas. The Association also encourages librarians to proactively support the First Amendment rights of all library users, regardless of sex, gender identity, gender expression, or sexual orientation.

Adopted June 30, 1993, by the ALA Council; amended July 12, 2000; June 30, 2004; and July 2, 2008.

http://ifmanual.org/accesslibrary
Collection Management Issues

The “Collection Management” section gathers together all the details involved in selection, acquisitions, processing, and maintenance; it provides a task-, not principle-, oriented perspective.

Evaluation or Assessment Method
- Describes how the staff analyzes the collection
- Helps set goals for growth or changes

Cooperative Collection Development
- Lists any collection development–based agreements with other libraries
- Helps explain why the library may not collect certain types of material

Selection Responsibilities
- Describes selection duties assigned to the staff
- Indicates who actually makes the final selection decisions
- Explains the nature and scope of any regular staff meetings devoted to collection development issues

Collection Assessment and Other Duties
- Describes other collection-related activities that may be assigned to the staff, e.g., reviewing interlibrary loan requests and sorting donations

Acquisitions
- Describes where the library orders its material and why
- Indicates the circumstances that might require a different procedure

Processing and Cataloging
- Describes how material is cataloged and processed
- Explains which material is fully processed, e.g., items purchased with library funds

Discarding
- Describes which material may be removed from the collection, why, and who makes the decision
- Explains what happens to the discarded items
Replacements/Rebinding
- Describes how the staff decides which items should be replaced or rebound
- Indicates which material may receive special consideration, e.g., out-of-print titles about local history

Duplication of Materials
- Explains how selectors decide when to buy extra copies of a title, either for the main library or branches
- Indicates when duplicate copies might be appropriate in different places, e.g., adult and juvenile fiction collections for certain classics

Donations/Memorials
- Describes how selectors decide whether or not to add donations to the collection and what the library does with the items it doesn’t add
- Explains that the library will not provide a monetary value for donations and why
- Describes the process for memorial donations

Local Authors Collection
- Explains how the library handles material published by local residents

New Books/Staff Picks
- Describes the nature of material included in special display shelving
- Explains that displaying these items does not denote endorsement

Collection Maintenance
- Describes the extent to which the library will undertake preservation or conservation of library material
- Mentions any plans the library may have for disaster preparedness or other maintenance issues
There are many ways to keep books away from the readers who want them, and putting them in staff-only shelves with no record in the catalog is one of them. The fact that users are asking for them in spite of this barrier is a clear indication that the library has failed to recognize its users’ needs. Further, the barrier rests on a biased assessment: rejecting Christian fiction on the basis that it doesn’t meet the library’s selection criteria for literary quality makes it very difficult to justify purchasing multiple copies of some best-selling titles.

Another way to keep “controversial” material away from the user is for the cataloger or processor to select which items come out of the backlog based on personal beliefs. Many automated systems can now track a book’s progress from order to circulation-ready item, and your library might want to include a monthly report that lists material spending a longer-than-average time in the processing area, just to check.

CASE STUDY 3

Dave just started a job as manager of a small branch library in the Big City Library System. As he settled in and explored the library, he found the shelves set aside for discards. He noticed that many of the items seemed to be in good shape and had fairly recent publication dates. Puzzled, he looked at them more closely and realized that all of them were “controversial.” He hadn’t been able to find a copy of the system’s discard procedures, but he remembered an encouraging discussion about intellectual freedom with the system director in his interview and was surprised at what appeared to be “censorship by weeding.”

In this case, Dave has exposed a way that some librarians quietly dispose of material which they may dislike or which they fear may become a target of controversy. All libraries need to evaluate their collections regularly, so they can free up valuable shelf space by removing items that are outdated, superseded, or badly worn. This practice is sound collection management and something few libraries get around to frequently enough.

However, when libraries remove items because of their “controversial” content, they are practicing censorship, not collection management.

Further, removing material without following the library’s reconsideration procedure, as above, may invite legal problems because of “improper motivation.”
Evaluating Library Collections

An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights

The continuous review of library materials is necessary as a means of maintaining an active library collection of current interest to users. In the process, materials may be added and physically deteriorated or obsolete materials may be replaced or removed in accordance with the collection maintenance policy of a given library and the needs of the community it serves. Continued evaluation is closely related to the goals and responsibilities of each library and is a valuable tool of collection development. This procedure is not to be used as a convenient means to remove materials that might be viewed as controversial or objectionable. Such abuse of the evaluation function violates the principles of intellectual freedom and is in opposition to the Preamble and Articles I and II of the Library Bill of Rights, which state:

The American Library Association affirms that all libraries are forums for information and ideas, and that the following basic policies should guide their services:

1. Books and other library resources should be provided for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all people of the community the library serves. Materials should not be excluded because of the origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation.

2. Libraries should provide materials and information presenting all points of view on current and historical issues. Materials should not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval.

The American Library Association opposes internal censorship and strongly urges that libraries adopt guidelines setting forth the positive purposes and principles of evaluation of materials in library collections.

Adopted February 2, 1973, by the ALA Council; amended July 1, 1981; and June 2, 2008.

http://ifmanual.org/evaluatinglibrary
The interpretation “Evaluating Library Collections” can help develop and explain weeding procedures to both the staff and the public.

CASE STUDY 4

For the last six months, Lakeside Township has been embroiled in a major controversy about a sex education title that discusses abortion in the high school library. Sally, the public library director, decided to make two copies of the book available there, so that the community could examine it, but no one had filed a complaint with her. Agnes, a member of the Keep Lakeside Township Clean coalition, a group that formed to get rid of the book, brought in a box of books and demanded that Sally add all of them to the collection. After examining each book, she decided to add only four of the eleven items, since the library already had two of them, and the others were either too old or too damaged. The KLTC coalition accused Sally of bias and censorship in a newspaper interview, because she didn’t add all the books.

This situation may be uncomfortable, but if the library accedes to their request, it will be setting an unfortunate precedent and may find it difficult to refuse future requests, regardless of suitability. It’s important to establish the policy that selectors will evaluate all material, regardless of the source, on the basis of their library’s adopted selection criteria, and will handle materials according to the library’s collection management policies and procedures. It’s also important to be able to demonstrate that the library has material in the collection that represents the full spectrum of viewpoints, particularly in sensitive areas. See the interpretation “Diversity in Collection Development.”

OTHER POTENTIAL COLLECTION-RELATED COMPLAINTS

The library won’t buy the textbooks I need for my high school class.

There are so many school textbooks that your library may not have the space or the budget to collect them. Also, if the library participates in a cooperative collection development agreement, there may be a collecting priority statement that places responsibility for this material with the school district libraries.
I’ve been waiting for your books about tattoos for six months, and now I’ve found out they’ve all been stolen. Again. How long do I have to wait before you buy new copies?

Some books seem to walk out the door as soon as they’re replaced. If the library decides it won’t replace them at some point, it should probably have a statement justifying the decision on a management-directed, content-neutral basis. Otherwise, the practice could be used as another quiet way to get rid of “unacceptable” material, or the library could be accused of bias.

You spend all that taxpayer money with a company in NotYourState, not here in town.

I’ve included this item only because it’s related to the collection. The library may want to have a statement in its policy that explains the discounts and time saved by dealing with a primary vendor, to prevent hearing this comment from the mayor.

You never have enough best sellers. Why don’t you buy more copies so I don’t have to wait so long?

For some titles, the library could never buy enough copies to fill the demand. Since this complaint surfaces fairly regularly, the collection management section should have a statement that describes how and when the library buys duplicate copies.

I’ve just written a wonderful history of my home town, back in NotYourState. I’ll give you these four copies, and I can’t wait to see them on the shelves.

Particularly with the advent of desktop publishing, many people are producing books. While your library wants to accommodate its local residents, it also doesn’t want to accept material for the collection that doesn’t meet the selection criteria. In this instance, the library may want to establish a special collection, one that appears in the catalog, so people can find it, but one that receives minimal processing. These items should be available somewhere in the library other than the main stacks, like a special collections area or display case.

Why don’t you have any computer games I can check out? I can’t afford to keep buying them.

Adding a new format of material to the collection is more complicated than the public realizes. Particularly with new electronic media, your library may need
new shelving and processing supplies, in addition to new cataloging paths. Also, providing more than just a few items is important for an opening-day collection. Having a statement in the policy helps explain these decisions and gives them authority.

*I found this DVD on the Staff Picks shelf. Why are you pushing this trash?*

If your library has an area that displays new books or staff recommendations, it may receive complaints like this one. Including a statement reminding users that the library does not endorse the material in the collection can help answer this question. Also, the policy should include a specific statement that supports the staff’s freedom to choose material based on their personal judgment. The staff should be alert to users who put their own choices in these areas in order to provoke a challenge by highlighting particularly graphic or explicit items.

**QUESTIONS TO ASK**

- Does the library have a collection development policy with selection criteria?
- Has the library board adopted the ALA Library Bill of Rights and its interpretations? Any other intellectual freedom policies or statements?
- Is there a reconsideration procedure?
- Is there a form available for a reconsideration request?
- Are these documents readily available to the public? How and where?
- Does the staff know about these policies and procedures?

**NOTE**

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